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Death and its Consequences considered:

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S E R M O N,

Preached in the Church of Moffat, on the
Death of his late MAJESTY King
GEORGE II.

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By EDWARD JOHNSTONE, M. A.
Minister at MOFFAT.

*And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches and
honour; 1 Chron. xxix. 28.*

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ST. R. M. O. N.

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By Edward Johnston M.A.
Director of the British Museum

and is dedicated to the memory of
the late Sir John Lubbock

EDWARD JOHNSTON
Printed by the British Museum

S E R M O N.

JOB. xxxviii. ver. 17.

Have the Gates of Death been opened unto thee? Or hast thou seen the Doors of the shadow of Death?

IT is needless to stay in relating, that this book of Job is among the most ancient writings now in the world, or to be too critical in inquiring, either after the country or the precise character of its penman.—These things have been long ago as far fixed as they can well be, and indeed as far as serves for the purpose of edification. The hero of this sacred history or narrative, is Job; a person, who, from a great height

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of prosperity and worldly grandeur, is all suddenly plunged into the deepest distress that could effect him, either as the proprietor of a princely fortune,—as a father,—or as a man.—In this situation his afflictions had like to have effaced his sense of religion and providence, and to have disposed him to entertain hard thoughts even concerning God and the ways of his divine government. A debate concerning this subject had been maintained between Job and his relations, in some of the pages preceeding the words of my text, until the grand Umpire of nature, and the last Judge of all controversies condescended to interpose, in a manner that seems to show, that Job, afflicted as he had been, and though confessedly a favourite of heaven, had yet on the present occasion expressed himself with sentiments importing so much of peevishness and spiritual pride, as, for his own benefit, behoved to be corrected. And this the Almighty himself is seen to condescend to, and undertake, in a language, and after a manner no where else to be found, but all like the Majesty that spoke it; and which, as a learned

Commentator

Commentator * has well observed, exceeds every thing human, more than the voice of thunder does the faint and dying whisper, The poor pretender to knowledge, is immediately nonplused with a variety of important questions concerning nature above, below, and all around him; surpassing the human intellect, calculated to take pride from man, and which none other than their infinite Propounder could solve: Of these important and interesting questions, the words of our text help to make up the number.—The Author of the universe, He who inhabits eternity, and knows all its diffuse parts infinitely well; He to whom pertain the issues of life and death, puts the question to a creature, by the law of its existence doomed to mortality, and obliged to this grand experiment. *Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?* This, in these darker days, when the discoveries of revealed religion were less ample and perfect, was then a most serious and trying

* Bishop Patrick,

question;

question ; and even now that life and immortality are brought to light, it still in some measure remains to be so.

And therefore, in discoursing further from these words, I shall be directed by the following method.

1st, I shall inquire after the meaning of the question here by the Almighty put to Job.—*Have the gates of death been opened unto thee, &c.*

2^{dly}, I shall attempt an improvement of this interesting subject.

I. The *first* the first thing proposed was, To inquire after the meaning of the question here, by the Almighty, put to Job.

And in the *first* place, this awful question seems plainly to import, that what immediately precedes death, and shall introduce it, is for the most part concealed from the human-kind ; since we know not before hand, neither when, nor how, nor by what means ourselves or others shall be brought to undergo this mighty conflict ; equally ignorant of the disease, the fatal accident, or disaster, which will be the means that

that shall bring us to the gates of death, and open the doors of that house which is appointed for all living. This is a tremendous event to an accountable creature ; but it is an event for important ends concealed. *Man knoweth not his time.*

2dly, Strictly speaking, it is really beyond our power to describe what death is : for, as we know not the manner how soul and body were at first united, or by what means that union subsists ; so neither know we the manner how this union is dissolved. *The spirit of man*, (said a wise discerning King, meaning after death) *goes upward*.* But in what manner is that ascent ? Whether is its flight, and where is the region to which it tends ? These are secrets. And here the mind, in her activity, employs herself in musing on yet untried events, in looking at her journey to a residence yet unknown, to join with inhabitants of whose existence or manners our present ideas are exceedingly imperfect. To this purpose an English Poet has well expressed our condition and our correspondent feel-

*E ccl. iii. 21.

ings. With what dreadful curiosity says he does the soul launch out into the vast ocean of eternity, and resign herself to an untried abyss,—to be we know not what and live we know not how.†

3dly, In this present state of trial, In this first stage of our existence, though we have heard of heaven, and of hell also; yet at present these are the objects of faith only, and not of sense. We see them but through a glass, and darkly, as an inspired writer speaks it: for experiences tells us, that we have no correspondence at all with separate souls, nor any personal acquaintance with their present state; there is a boundary fixed between them and us, which to this hour has limited curiosity, and put a bar upon all intelligence. Of their affairs we know not, nor do we hear from them; nor, at least, as mortals do, do they from us. Thus it has ever been, and thus most probably it ever will be, whilst we are surrounded with flesh and blood. In this world of sense, we have spoken, and will speak of the world of spirits, as blind men do of colours; and when we come to re-

† Mr Norris.

move to that same world, shall probably then be amazed, to find how much we were mistaken.

Lastly, In this state of darkness, of one point the active ever-plodding mind is or might be satisfied, namely, That, after death, perceptive duration ceases not; but if the joint evidence of reason and revelation merit belief, the soul is then and there introduced to a state of being decisive of its happiness or misery to all eternity. This thought is of vast concern; it is of unspeakable importance; it makes every apology needless for this argument, or the following reflections. The second thing proposed was, To attempt an improvement of this interesting subject. It indeed gives rise to considerations of great extent, which might well be reserved to a place by themselves. We shall nevertheless conclude this part of the argument with the following thoughts.

Since then death is revealed, and that the living to a certainty know that they must die; since the consequences of death also are revealed, That the soul is imperishable, and that it feels and must forever feel, or, joy,
or

or sorrow and anguish, in proportion to its present conduct. If these are facts, or if they are acknowledged as such, How shall we then account for the conduct of mankind? In what point of light shall this strange Phænomenon of thoughtlessness appear, figured indeed by what often happens with respect to this world, but verified chiefly by what relates to our future condition? In what a strange point of light does man appear in the following circumstances? and yet ask your hearts, as I go along, whether the reflections are not true.—a considerable part of mankind sport away their worldly means, take every method of being reduced to poverty, and yet are covetous of riches, and fond of power.—A considerable part of mankind squander away their stock of health, when yet it is the very thing of which naturally they are the most solicitous—lavish of *lustrums*,* and yet fond of life, as the

* A Lustrum was an expiatory feast among the ancient Romans, at the end of every five years, instituted by Servius Tullius, and which gave rise to the Roman computation of time by Lustrums — The Author's meaning therefore most probably
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lively Author of the *Night Thoughts* has finely expressed it; and would give the whole world, were it in their power, for its continuance, when the whole world would not purchase it; just so in spiritual concernments, mankind are seen to sin away their most precious opportunities, I mean their present days of grace and offered mercy, until, as was lately told concerning worldly matters, the opportunity is lost and gone for ever; and when this mournful event happens, what thousands of worlds would they not pledge for the revival of former hopes, or for the return of these days, which yet alas! shall never arrive—wherefore, O my brethren, do the wicked from day to day thus condemn God, and trifle with salvation. Why do they live as if heaven were no more than a fancy'd landscape, or hell only a painted fire; that neither the torments of the damned can work upon their fears, nor yet the joys of

is, That though life is short, and will not hold out to the end; of but very few, fifth-years; yet men, by intemperance, endeavour to make it shorter, and are nevertheless, above all things, at last eager of its continuance.

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the glorified excite or animate their hopes.† How fatal, how dreadfully unaccountable is this delusion? The present glaring punishments which attend a vicious course have no influence on the generality of men ; nor are its future and more tremendous consequences, of which these now mentioned are but the sad, though certain presages, any restraint.

II. We proceed now to the second thing proposed, namely, To the general improvement of this subject; and, out of the great variety of reflections which occur, we shall confine ourselves to these which follow.

In the *first* place, the certainty of death, and of its consequent immortalities, ought to excite in us gratitude to our Maker, who, in man's original frame, constituted him an immortal creature, that is, made his soul of such a texture, that it seemed to partake of divinity itself. This was the Almighty's own act to form us so much after his own image,

† The Rev. Mr Crawford late of Welton's works, published at Edinburgh 1744, vol. II.

as to make us capable of sublime and rational pleasures for ever and ever.

Secondly, It ought to excite in us thankfulness to the Author of our nature, that notwithstanding, through our original defection from the law of virtue; he had entailed death upon the human body as a punishment due to sin; yet, *now*, neither with respect to body nor mind has he left us in a hopeless state. Even, without the assistance of revelation, reason in her progress had worked out some very satisfactory arguments, drawn from the goodness of deity, and from the faculties and propensions of the soul itself, to convince us that some such condition was yet in reserve, after death had closed this mortal scene. *Cicero*, that great light of ancient *Rome*, and indeed the best and greatest men of all antiquity, have expressed themselves with the firmest confidence, and with sentiments, all things considered, surprisingly clear, upon this most interesting article. But where unassisted reason failed, revelation has been sent in with timely aids; and Jesus Christ, the great author and finisher of our salvation, who, by way of eminence, is said to

to have brought life and immortality to light, has not only, by his doctrines, convinced us of the immortality of our souls, but assured us of the resurrection of the human body also, and by his expiatory death, his resurrection and ascension in human nature, has given us, as our head and representative, the firmest pledge and the most lively hopes, having likewise engaged divine veracity to this great end. *I will not leave you comfortless*, said he to his disciples, and in them to the whole believing progeny. *But if I go away, I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also, to behold my glory* *. *I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*——*He that believeth in me shall never die* †. *I have purchased your life, and because I live, ye shall live also.* ‡. Thus, by the Redeemer's power, the body doomed for a season to corruption and mortality, shall yet at last infallibly burst the bars of the grave, triumph over death, and rise to a participation of glory and immortal activity.

* John xiv. 3. 17. 24. † John xi. 25. 26. ‡ John xiv. 19.

Thirdly,

Thirdly, The certainty of death, as an inevitable law, and from which no part of mankind, of whatever rank, whether kings or country men, has ever been exempted ; this ought to engage us in a submissive resignation to the will of providence, making it our humble endeavour, in the course of this period of our existence, to please him who made us ; then may we, on reasonable grounds, expect, that he who called us into being, shall continue to be our protector, nor ever abandon us to misery in any future period of our never-ending duration.

Fourthly, The certainty of death, and yet the grand uncertainty of the time, of the manner, or of the consequences of death, ought to engage us in a continual state of vigilance, and of preparation, lest that day come upon us unawares. This cannot be done, if our hearts are drowned in sensuality, oppressed with the cares of this world, or the too eager pursuits of any thing strictly that pertains to it. These are the injunctions of him who knew time and eternity infinitely well. These are the Saviour's own words, *Take heed, said he, lest your hearts be over-*
charged

charged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and that that day come upon you unawares." Watch then for your souls, my brethren, as becomes them that must render an account unto Almighty God.

Fifthly, If you are confessedly immortal creatures, if made for heaven; then ought you daily to exercise your minds, by every argument that might excite your longings after that blessed immortality; for what have we that ought to detain us here,—and wouldst thou, O man, if permitted, for ever chuse to undergo this nauseous sluggish round? Wouldst thou for ever feel the hazards of unlawful pleasure, the pangs of disappointment, or the tortures that arise from having been an injurer, or from being injured?—No: The soul is of a sublimer cast; her bent is towards heaven, even to God the supreme good. The Christian's longings are to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, to the general assembly on high; to join their blessed choir, and sing their triumphant song.—Raise your hearts then to heaven, Christians! for, seek you happiness? It is there, only: Seek you the society of the
most

most lovely, or those whom on earth you loved most? They are there. O my soul! when thou reflectest how many worthy men, who might seem to have deserved life much better than thee, how many lovely women, how many dear companions, are gone before thee, art thou not then resigned to this prospect? art thou not resigned, did I say?—rather ought I not to have said, art thou not ashamed yet to be alive.*——O Death, now hast thou lost thy sting; come do thy last, thy concluding office; let days and years and intervening shadows pass quickly, and bring my soul home to her Saviour, to her eternal rest, to be for ever with her friends, her supreme Benefactor, her Sanctifier, her God.——

Lastly, Let us, as candidates for eternity, bend our best thoughts to this subject. *Pingo in eternum,*” (I paint for eternity) the

* The thought here, is borrowed from Sir William Temple, whose words are, When I consider, says he, how many noble and esteemable men, how many lovely and agreeable women, I have outlived among my acquaintances and friends, methinks it looks impertinent still to be alive.

Sir William Temple's works published at London 1720.

saying of a celebrated ancient painter, methinks ought to be adopted as the motto of every Christian.—This is the noblest emulation. Soon shall we come to be convinced there is nothing in this world worth resting on,—nay the soul will not rest ; she is heaven-descended ; she defies the chains of flesh ; she is formed for higher life ; she will burst this mortal shell ; she must yet regain her freedom in eternal day : Hasten then, my brethren, improving these moments of expectation, whilst they quickly and inevitably pass ; “ Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord, for as much as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.”—How dreadful are the thoughts of a creature’s passing into eternity under its Maker’s frowns, and under the displeasure of him who is Almighty. Annihilation here, were it permitted, were a wish to be preferred. Better, O man, were it for thee, that a millstone were hanged about thy neck, and thou cast into the sea, and there, insensible for ever, to mingle with the deep, than undergo the displeasure of him whose
favour

favour only is life, and whose frowns are worse than death itself.—Notwithstanding these most awful considerations, how melancholy is it that in spite of every argument, mankind have walked, and still walk in the ways of their own heart. The professor of religious tenets, and he who gives them up, often join in this, by practically forgetting God ; and equally acting, as if they believed in no future state. In worldly matters, men trifle not thus ; nor being forewarned of future worldly trials, are they equally unconcerned. The only things, alas ! they often hear with unconcern, and tremble not at, are these awful concerns, at which they ought most of all to stand solicitous, and shall, at last, tremble, namely, death, the subject of which we have now been treating ; judgment to come, and its consequent, eternity. Let it not be so with you, my brethren ! but be wise for your souls, and act your part in life, in such a manner, that when the gates of death shall be opened unto you, a rich and an abundant entrance may then be administered into that heaven-

ly kingdom, and to those eternal joys purchased by our Lord.

I have been led to these reflections from an event too important not to have been already universally known, proclaimed not more by the outward mourning-dress, than by the unfeigned lamentations of united Britain. I will not attempt to heighten your sorrow, neither shall I endeavour to wipe off the loyal tear, nor stop the current of so just a grief. Surely every member of this grand community must feel, when such a nation has been deprived of such a Head. For, who was it that dignified the British throne, by acts of justice, that maintained your laws, nor ever violated public or private right, either in a civil or religious sense? who was it that shewed an exemplary regard for public worship, and greatly awed every indecorum from around his Royal person? who never signed the warrant of death against the transgressors of the law, but with pity and reluctance, even when the transgression was pointed against Majesty itself? Who was it that charm'd that long untam'd monster, Rebellion, that by his clemency

clemency gained the stern, lofty Caledonian *, and taught him usefully to exert his fell martial spirit in defence of Britain's liberties and rights? Into whose hand was it that the KING OF NATIONS delivered his vindictive sword, and commanded him, as

* The Highlanders, viz. descended from the most ancient inhabitants of this island, and who never submitted to the Roman yoke. His Majesty by employing these people in his service, shewed wisdom and good government to such a degree, as it is not easy to find words to express; the happy effects of which have already appeared in manifold instances, and will still further appear. The establishment of so compleat an union among the inhabitants of this island, was reserved to be one of the setting glories of GEORGE II. and I shall be forgiven for quoting, on this occasion, with little variation, the compliment paid by a poet of our own to the British territory, and shall pay it where it is most due, to the head of the State: for to the Sovereign of these lands, of a truth, now it might be said,

*—Thine's the warm Cambrian, thine's the lofty Scot
To hardships tam'd, active in arts and arms;
Fir'd with a restless, an impatient Flame,
That leads him, raptur'd, where ambition calls,
And English merit's thine.*

Mr Thomson's works, Vol. 2. published at London 1738.

—Such a combined force, as Britain and its connexions, is now too great and too powerful for any outward enemy; and through the blessing of Providence, the gates of hell shall never prevail against it.

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the instrument of His providence, to humble the faithless haughty tyrants of this world? Who was it that raised the fame and power of Britain to a pitch and eminence exceeding all its former splendor?—It was—it was, my brethren! your deceased monarch.

Mourn ye sons and daughters of this land of liberty at the loss of your great-protector, who, with a tender-hearted parent's feelings, watched over all your civil and your sacred interests; who cloathed you with scarlet, and in whose ever-memorable reign were imported to you delicacies, riches, and honours, from every quarter of the globe.

But, finally, as death is unavoidable, and that even Kings, the greatest and worthiest of Kings, must die; whilst with awful reverence you contemplate the universal law of death, see that, with your tears, you join also your warmest gratitude to heaven, which so long continued with you the blessings of His inestimable life, and that, at last, your great monarch died surrounded with victories, incircled with unrivalled triumphs, full of days, and distinguished with peculiar honours;

honours ; and let it be your daily prayer to Almighty God, that, along with his earthly Crown, his spirit, his magnanimity, his clemency, his love of his people, and all his virtues, may descend to the Royal Youth, who now, after him, is seated on the British throne. That, as the auspicious reign of GEORGE II. will for ever do honour to the British annals ; so his posterity after him may continue on the throne, to be the illustrious guardians of a free and happy people, until time shall be no longer, and earthly governments shall be no more.

F I N I S.

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TIS fit the Public should be acquainted, that the quotations in the foregoing sermon are either exactly in the words of their honourable and devout Authors; or, where these are in any particular departed from, the spirit of the passage has been preserved.

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